



June 13, 2007

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In the Hudson Valley

Reducing our Dependence on Foreign Oil through Alternative Energy

On Saturday, June 9th, I brought together experts in the field of biofuels to discuss with local residents, many of whom are farmers, how we can increase America's energy independence through the use of alternative sources of energy such as biofuels.

With this summer's high gas prices, reducing our dependence on foreign oil is more important than ever. Experts at my forum explained how biofuel crops grown by local farmers can replace imported gasoline and showed how individuals can switch to biofuels in their cars and homes to save money. If America is ever going to achieve energy independence, we must invest in new energy sources, including those our own farmers can grow right here in the Hudson Valley. By growing our fuel in the U.S. instead of drilling for it in the Middle East, we can have energy that lowers fuel prices, strengthens national security, and creates new jobs at home.

In Orange County we have many farmers and natural resources that can be used to bring us closer to energy independence. At Saturday's forum we talked about a number of currently available technologies including using homegrown grasses for pelletized and liquid biofuels, including ethanol, cellulosic-ethanol, and biodiesel.

Two biodiesel-powered cars in the parking lot outside the forum provided evidence that this technology is already in use.

The biofuels forum was the second in a series of public events I am holding on energy independence. The first, "Harvesting Wind Power for the Hudson Valley," was held April 9th in Beacon to an overflow crowd of engaged citizens. I plan to host future events highlighting solar, hydro and geothermal power as well as energy-efficiency. I hope you can join me for the next one!

District Work Week Dedicated to Health Care Issues

The number of uninsured children and adults continues to rise nationwide and the problems created by America's health care crisis are some of the most pressing of our day. To hear from the people in my district, I held several roundtables and meetings last week with small business owners, children's health care experts, universal health care advocates and concerned constituents.

Here in the Hudson Valley, thousands of residents don't have access to affordable, high quality health care and the cost of health insurance is a major hurdle for small businesses, families and individuals alike.

I'm committed to working with my colleagues in Congress to solve the problems of skyrocketing health care costs and make affordable, quality care available to everyone.



Congressman Hall meets with children's health care experts at a roundtable June 4th in Peekskill

On Capitol Hill

The War in Iraq

Like most Americans, I believe the war in Iraq was a mistake and that it is time to begin the process of bringing our troops home. Since coming to Congress, my votes on the war in Iraq have been guided by the principle that any legislation I support must have a responsible, specific timeline to redeploy U.S. troops, while requiring the Iraqi government to move toward resolution of religious and sectarian violence.

I have voted four times in five months to provide nearly \$100 billion for military spending in Iraq and Afghanistan, including extra money to improve our fight against Al Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan. These bills also required the Iraqi Parliament to meet specific benchmarks to reign in their militias and limit sectarian violence. They required the President to follow the troop readiness standards established by the Pentagon and a withdrawal of U.S. combat troops from Iraq by August 2008. Unfortunately, the President vetoed this first bill the Congress sent him and threatened to veto the second.

At the end of May, after the President repeatedly blocked funding to troops in the field, Congress passed an amendment to provide four months of funding for the war in Iraq. Because this legislation did not specify a timeline for redeployment I voted against it.

Four years after President Bush declared "Mission Accomplished," the quagmire in Iraq spirals out of control and it is clear that the President is out of ideas other than to send more troops. Congress has a constitutional responsibility to decide when and whether to declare war and what funds to appropriate for what purposes.

I will continue to work with my colleagues to wind down our involvement in Iraq so that we can concentrate on protecting our country from legitimate security threats and address urgent business here at home.

Pay Veterans before Bureaucrats

I recently learned that senior Department of Veterans Affairs officials received the most lucrative "performance" bonuses in government at a time when the VA is running a shameful claims backlog and a severe budget shortfall that threatens veterans' healthcare. To make VA officials more accountable, I introduced legislation to freeze the 2007 bonuses of senior officials until the disability claims backlog of 600,000 is reduced to fewer than 100,000.

Veterans currently are waiting an average of 177 days for their first claim to be processed. If a veteran is denied coverage on his or her first application, the appeal currently takes an average of two years. This wait is unconscionable, and distributing lucrative bonuses when the system is failing our veterans does not represent the "pay for performance" principle espoused by the Bush administration. As long as I am in Congress I will continue to fight to ensure that veterans and soldiers are not just honored with platitudes and proclamations, but with the physical and mental health care and economic assistance this country owes them.



Congressman Hall meets with veterans after a committee hearing in Washington, D.C.

Helping Hudson Valley Families Fight High Gas Prices

Gas prices in New York have been steadily skyrocketing for months, and they are hitting many Hudson Valley families hard. Recently the average jumped to \$3.22 a gallon, matching the March 1981 inflation-adjusted all-time high price for gasoline in the United States. Meanwhile, the six largest oil companies announced \$30 billion in profits for the first quarter of 2007. This follows the \$125 billion in record profits they made in 2006. The House has passed a number of energy-independence measures, and the Senate is considering major energy legislation this week.

One of my top priorities in Congress is to bring down record-high gas prices and secure an independent energy future for our country.

To invest in America's energy future, one of my first votes this year was to roll back **\$14 billion** in taxpayer subsidies to the major oil companies (who were allowed by the previous Congress to drill

on public land without paying fees or royalties) and reinvest that money here at home in clean, renewable energy to replace foreign oil.

I also joined my colleagues in the House to pass H.R. 1252, The Federal Price Gouging Prevention Act, to crack down on profiteering by the oil companies. This bill, which is awaiting action in the Senate, would provide relief to consumers by giving the Federal Trade Commission the authority to investigate and punish companies that artificially inflate the price of gas, setting criminal penalties for price gouging, and permitting states to bring lawsuits against wholesalers or retailers who engage in such practices.

The House also approved NOPEC, the No Oil Producing and Exporting Cartels Act of 2007, which authorizes the Justice Department to take legal action against OPEC state-controlled entities that participate in conspiracies to limit the supply, or fix the price, of oil. Nations or organizations that limit oil supply can artificially inflate the cost of gas and hurt American consumers. I hope the Senate will soon pass this legislation so we can send it to the President to sign.

On May 24th, I introduced legislation to require all advertisements for new cars, SUVs and light-duty trucks to prominently display the fuel consumption (miles per gallon) and estimated annual fuel costs of each vehicle being marketed. With soaring prices at the pump, consumers should know which vehicles are the gas guzzlers before they enter the dealership. Gas mileage figures were required on car ads in the 1970s, but the rule was dropped during the Reagan administration. Now it's not just a consumer issue, but a national security issue as well.

I am one of two freshmen Democrats appointed to the new Select Committee on Energy Independence and Global Warming. I will be working in the coming months with my colleagues on the Select Committee to increase public knowledge and awareness about the importance of energy independence and to support legislation that will enhance our national security, strengthen our economy, create jobs at home and protect our environment by reducing our dependence on foreign oil and fossil fuels.

How Can I Help?

If you are having a problem with the Veterans Administration, passport agency, Social Security office, or another Federal agency, my office is available to help. Please contact one of my district offices to initiate a casework request. Here are a few examples of veterans I have assisted in obtaining benefits that they had earned but been denied:

- A Vietnam veteran from Orange County whose disability benefits were reduced by 60% in 2003, even though he qualified for full benefits, called my district office in Goshen about his problem in January. We resolved his case with the Veterans Administration (VA) in just a few weeks. He was awarded a retroactive benefit check for more than \$17,000 and his monthly pension benefit increased five-fold.
- The widow of a WWII soldier had been receiving survivor benefits after her husband was killed in action, but they ceased when she remarried. Her second husband eventually passed away, and her case to reclaim her first husband's benefits was backlogged for 16 months. Her daughter called my Goshen office, which contacted the VA on her behalf. After our inquiry, the widow received both a monthly benefit of over \$1,000 per

month and a retroactive check of \$15,000. I was especially gratified that the payment arrived right before her 87th birthday.

- A Vietnam veteran suffering from PTSD had a claim languishing for nearly a year at the VA to increase his PTSD rating. He now collects a monthly check of more than \$700 and he received back benefits of \$6,900 as well.

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